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**New Program Provides Indian Entrepreneurs with Funds to Grow
Their Business**

(HELENA) – The Montana Department of Commerce has selected two Flathead Reservation entrepreneurs to be recipients of business development funds from the newly created Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund.

Glenn Aragon, the owner of Glenn's Native Metal Artwork and Tatonkaska (Tonka) Howard, the owner of Northern Star Blankets will split \$7,875 in equity funds. Both entrepreneurs will use the funds to grow their businesses on the Flathead Reservation.

"The Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund is a valuable resource for entrepreneurs who are searching for the funding necessary to propel their business to the next level," said Governor Brian Schweitzer. "Through this fund, Indian business owners will have the opportunity to achieve their goals and enhance their communities. Each success story will add to the momentum of economic change in Indian Country."

The Montana Department of Commerce launched the Montana Indianpreneur Equity Fund pilot project in February 2007, as resource for current or prospective Native American business owners interested in starting or expanding their business. The project was developed by Commerce in cooperation with the State Tribal Economic Development Commission and the Governor's Office of Economic Development.

"This equity fund helps empower Indianpreneurs who have dreamt of starting a business, but haven't had access to the equity needed to make their dream a reality," said Department of Commerce Director Anthony Preite. "The beauty of the Equity Fund is that it is flexible enough to accommodate new and growing businesses and funds will be leveraged with other monies or investment to create the maximum benefit."

Glenn Aragon will use the funds to purchase materials and upgrade his marketing materials and website. Aragon's work is on display throughout Montana, in Washington DC and in locations throughout the world in both public settings and in private collections. An active member of his community, Aragon has taught Metal Art Work at Salish Kootenai College for seven years.

Tatonkaska Howard will purchase equipment and inventory to increase blanket production and reduce production costs. Star blankets have a long tradition in Indian Country and are included in pow wows, ceremonies, and giveaways. Howard has been quilting and sewing star quilt tops for eleven years; his blankets are made in all sizes from baby to king with a variety of fabrics such as satin and cotton.

The Department of Commerce and State Tribal Economic Development Commission has made \$70,000 in Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) monies available for the Equity Fund. Equity Funds require a minimum dollar-per-dollar match from outside funds or collateral.

Other recipients include businesses owners from the Rocky Boys, Fort Belknap, Blackfeet, Fort Peck and Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservations, and the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa.

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